

Linda Clair
Ten-day Meditation Retreat
Kallara Conference Center, Australia – July 2021
Transcription from Audio Recordings

FILE 4B – Morning discussion

Question: I just wanted to check in about the last couple of days. It's been very challenging sitting and coming back to the breath. There's been like a tsunami of thinking, which has actually been going on in my practice at home a lot as well. Coming back has been pulling myself back all the time. I came to the retreat with this excitement and expectation of going for it, and I hit this wall of a lot of thinking. As I sat for the first couple of days I sort of hit the bottom of it, or something about it, that was fear. And I felt very destabilised by it, when I was sitting in my practice. It's still there, having to pull myself back all the time, and I feel an impatience with it.

Linda: Be patient, try and be patient, and keep doing this. You're here for ten days so this is just the beginning. You will feel the effects and the rewards of this later on, but you've got to be persistent. Don't let it put you off – it will do its best to destabilise you and put you off – but just keep going. Try not to expect anything. It's hard coming into a retreat. You do expect something, and something will happen but not what you expect to happen. You think you know what you want and what you want to happen and that's not going to happen, it's something completely different. You won't feel the full effects of this until after, until you go home. But if you keep doing this, working, coming back...

Question: Last night I didn't sleep terribly well. I felt like there was this me-being-in-my-body, and then there's the mind-body, like the mind's invasion of the body. And this fine line of having to keep tipping into coming-back-to-the breath. But feeling the intensity and the density of that – the mind in the body sort of thing.

Linda: Yes, it is, and what you're doing is gradually breaking it down. It's like a cancer that's gone right through the body and you're gradually going through purifying different bits of your past. It's your past stored in your body, and it's been there for a long time. It feels impossible, it feels endless, it feels like this is never going to stop – "I can't do this." But you can. You've got to be strong and determined and persistent, and keep going. And your sleep will be disturbed at times, especially during the retreat. Just accept that. It's the same for everyone. Sometimes it will be okay, sometimes not.

Question: I really haven't been sleeping well for a long time.

Linda: I've only started sleeping reasonably well the last few years. Before that it was very erratic. I still often wake up early. But it's a minor inconvenience compared to what happens with this, really. And you start to just accept it, and try and get bits of rest during the day if you can, do things like that. But you put all your energy into this for the rest of the retreat and a lot will happen. So just keep going

– try not to get put off. It's like there are these tentacles inside and you're just gradually unravelling them and removing them bit by bit.

Question: Yes, the first day I felt the stickiness of my personality, my ego – how sticky and messy it was somehow, and every action – there was no purity in it at all, there was just this sticky, messy, consequential experience of me. I thought, “How the hell am I going to get out of this?”

Linda: Just gradually, gradually, and you've already done a lot of work in your life. But this is intense, doing this is intense, and it's difficult. There's not really any entertainment, or even mantras or things like that, it's just this coming back again and again. But you will feel the effects of it, and the effects will be permanent. They won't be just some lovely, light experience, it will be in the depths of you, the effects of it. And that's the thing about this, it's maybe not as exciting or dazzling as some practices might seem to be, but it's getting to the source, to the root of your suffering. And that takes time and effort. But of course, on the way, you will have lovely light and amazing experiences.

Question: I feel like I found my seat today, but it's still really quite...

Linda: Well, often on the third day you do. It's when you start to settle in on a longer retreat, and that's when you really start to get into that solid work – “Okay, I'm going to sit.” From now on it will be different. So just apply yourself, keep going, there are no shortcuts.

Question: I feel very committed.

Linda: It's the most rewarding thing you can do in your life, and it will of course affect everyone around you.

How are you D? You've been very quiet too.

Question: Yes, I'm well, I'm just working really hard. I haven't had much pain this retreat, which surprised me because I was prepared for it, but just the mind. Every now and again I'll get a sit where I can really feel the belly, and then other sits it's just that mind, and I get taken with the mind. It's very attractive.

Linda: It is, like W. was saying, you just want to go off and daydream, it's very seductive. And if you're used to doing that it's very difficult to change that habit. Part of you wants to and part of you doesn't. It just goes, “Well why not?” But the thing is it's not always going to be nice and seductive. There're all the horrible bits that we forget about, where we feel incredibly anxious and fearful, and that's all the mind. It entices us with all this pleasurable stuff but then there's the other side. So you do have to be ruthless about it and just see thinking as thinking. Even though all you want to do is go off and think about lying on a beach on a desert island or doing something – anything but this – you have to just go, “No, this is what I'm here for, come back.”

Question: Yes, some of my thoughts have been really enticing, then others have got lots of rage and anger.

Linda: We're just as addicted to our suffering though, as our pleasurable bits. They're both seductive in different ways. So just let it happen and do your best to keep coming back to where you are, which is here. Have you been counting?

Question: Not so much, just focusing on the breath and the belly. It feels like there is a lot of space in my belly sometimes, it's quite vast. But just practicing the breathing.

Linda: So again, you'll feel it afterwards. When you're doing a retreat often you're working so hard it doesn't feel like you're making progress but you are, just by the fact that you're here doing this, being here, coming back. Just being here is progress. But it might not appear like there's progress when there's a block – feels like a brick wall sometimes stopping you – and impatience and resistance. But just keep going, keep going.

How are you A.?

Question: This morning the feeling was just absolute hopelessness. That I know there's nothing else in my life that I want to do, but feeling that this is just hopeless.

Linda: Well, I'm here to say, "It's not, for anyone." So don't get into that. You can't let yourself get taken in – well, maybe for a little while – "Poor me, I've been doing this for so long." But then you've got to get up and go, "Okay, I'm going to keep going." What else is there? What choice have you got?

Question: This last sit was better. I've been using the counting, not so much when I'm sitting, but in the day generally to keep me present. And I've been very conscious of fear my body all the time. Like I notice my body is somehow or other tight, and I let it go, but next time it's tight again.

Linda: It's great that you can see that.

Question: But...

Linda: It's *not* hopeless, so don't let yourself get sucked into that. You're a strong woman. Yes, you'll get sucked into it but you've got to go and have lunch, have a rest, get back on the horse, keep going.

Question: Yes. I'm a bit worn down by pain all the time. I don't even notice extra pain when I'm sitting, and in a way I miss that, but in another way I don't.

Linda: Well, sounds like you've got enough.

Question: Yes, it feels like enough.

Linda: It does wear you down, you get tired, it does feel hopeless – but it's not, and I'll keep saying it's not. That's why I'm here – to say it's not hopeless. But of course, your mind is going to keep going, "This is hopeless for you; it's alright for other people." And you'll get into this victim mentality, which

most of us have been into: “Poor me, I’m special, it’s different for me. It’s alright for other people.” We all get into that – I know I did a lot – but then let it go, keep going.

Question: I know from other retreats that when I’m in the front couple of rows it’s always much tougher. Something about being this close to you will always stir up whatever mud is there available.

Linda: Yes, whatever needs to be stirred up will be. So now you go to the back, you can have a rest.

Linda: How are you going D.?

Question: Well, it’s hard to say. I’m in A.’s basket a little bit. The last few days, everything horrible I’ve ever thought about myself, I’ve revisited it. But today I felt more able to – well, I wouldn’t say let it go – but not be so influenced by that continuous yak, yak, yak up there. But also today, I have felt quite strong sitting here for quite a long time. But then I was back to the old days with the pain, and then I felt I was going to faint. But I didn’t let myself faint, which is probably my next step.

Linda: Where was the pain?

Question: In my sit-bones, in my bum.

Linda: You do not have to sit for three hours every morning.

Question: No, I didn’t, I did the first walk. I feel like what you’ve said to me... I feel like I’ve been hit by a ten-ton truck and I’m all splattered, but still somehow I’ve managed to keep together my negative image of myself going and going. It’s amazing. And I can see how incorrect it is, how it’s not even a true summary of what I think about me – if there is a ‘me’ to think about. I just feel absolutely totally fucked up in every possible way. It’s kind of a relief I suppose in some way – “Well, I don’t know who I am! I don’t know what I’m doing here.” Something makes me come, even when I can’t follow these very simple instructions of coming back to the belly.

Linda: Well, that sounds great. (Laughter.) Seriously, it does. It’s about time.

Question: Thank you.

Linda: So again, keep going. You don’t know who you are. Nothing you think is true. So, what’s the point in thinking? It’s a habit; you’ve breaking the habit.

It’s only the third day. Who knows what’s going to happen? Don’t predict, just keep doing what you’re doing. So have those breaks, when the pain is that intense maybe get up and do the walking, it’s up to you. But I don’t want you fainting. If you feel like that put your head down.

Question: But when I do that, in that moment I feel, "Oh, I've really lost it now." I feel like I should be able to sit through it without being a drama queen all the time. It's disappointing, annoying, that habit where I want to pass through the pain, but I've never in all these years been able to sit with it.

Linda: When it's in your bum like that it's particularly severe and particularly difficult to sit with, and getting up or putting your head down does not mean you're a failure. You're the one saying that; nobody else is. You're the one who expects yourself to sit through it. So it's part of this thing that you've got of being superwoman.

Question: I have never in all my life felt like I was a superwoman!

Linda: Well, that's sometimes how you have behaved, like you want to be superwoman, you're trying to prove yourself. Not just you, lots of people. I was like that to a degree too – "I can do this, I can do that." But you're not, so don't expect yourself to sit through that degree of pain. It's too much. I'd say get up a bit and do the walking in the mornings. Sometimes it's right to sit for longer, other times not.

(Not transcribed: E. talking about spider bite reaction.)